

**RUSH HOLT**  
Twelfth District, New Jersey

1214 Longworth Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
202-225-5801  
Fax 202-225-6025

50 Washington Road  
West Windsor, NJ 08550  
609-750-9365  
Fax 609-750-0618

<http://holt.house.gov>



## Congress of the United States

September 16, 2011

Chair  
Select Intelligence Oversight Panel  
Committee on Appropriations

Committee on Education  
and Labor

Permanent Select Committee  
on Intelligence

Committee on Natural Resources

The Honorable Leon Panetta  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon, Room 3E880  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta,

I am writing to seek your help in clarifying the Department's policy on the disposition of the unclaimed remains of American military personnel killed in combat.

Recently, I learned that in at least one case involving unclaimed additional remains of a U. S. servicemember killed in Iraq the unclaimed remains were incinerated with medical waste and discarded in a landfill in Virginia. Your legislative affairs office has provided my staff with information that suggests that this was standing Department policy as late as June 2008. After that date (according to the interim email response from your staff), it appears that unclaimed remains of servicemembers killed in action were cremated, then placed in sea salt urns and disposed of at sea.

To help me better understand the history of the Department's practice with respect to the disposition of unclaimed additional human remains of servicemembers killed in action, I ask that you provide answers to the following questions:

What was the Department's policy regarding the disposition of unclaimed additional human remains from the end of the Vietnam War through the present? Do the individual services have separate SOPs?

Is it true that prior to June 2008 unclaimed additional human remains were cremated and disposed of in landfills?

Were such unclaimed additional human remains only cremated and mixed with other unclaimed human remains, or have such remains been mixed with incinerated medical waste and then disposed of?

Which medical waste disposal companies were employed by the Department for this purpose? Please provide copies of applicable contracts, addendum, etc.

Regarding the use of sea salt urns for at-sea burials, can you provide me the number of such burials that have been conducted to date, including year-by-year data and copies of purchase orders for the urns?

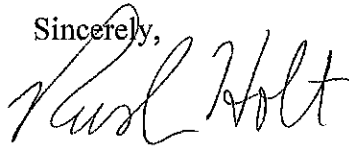
Why are unclaimed additional human remains not interred at Arlington National Cemetery or another federal cemetery where the original remains are interred?

How many unclaimed additional human remains of servicemembers killed in Iraq or Afghanistan have been recovered, repatriated to the United States, and disposed of since September 12, 2001?

Who provides the PADD (person allowed to direct disposition) form to family members? Does it come from a Casualty Assistance Officer? If so, who informs the CAO of the identity of the PADD and how do they verify they're being given the correct information?

Your prompt answers to my questions will be appreciated. My thanks for your continued service to our nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rush Holt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rush" and last name "Holt" clearly distinguishable.

RUSH HOLT  
Member of Congress